AMA president: Salute medicine’s heroes, prepare for hard work ahead

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In assuming the AMA’s highest post a year ago, Susan R. Bailey, MD, spoke of a hero’s journey. As she concluded her journey as the Association’s president in a virtual address to the AMA House of Delegates (HOD) at the June 2021 AMA Special Meeting, she remained awestruck at the way physicians rose to the challenge in an incredibly trying year for public health.

“No one has shouldered more in this pandemic than our courageous colleagues on the front lines—brave men and women from every state who have gone above and beyond in service to their patients and communities,” she said. “You will remain in our hearts and in our thoughts long after this pandemic is over.”

An era of inspiration

An allergist and immunologist from Fort Worth, Texas, Dr. Bailey’s journey through a remarkable career in medicine began as a patient who suffered severe allergies in her youth. She went on to become the first woman ever accepted at Texas A&M College of Medicine and has since spent more than three decades as a private practice physician.

She was inspired by physicians and policymakers along the way and impressed upon her colleagues in the HOD their ability to inspire change among their peers and patients.

“We inspire through our leadership, our advocacy and our action,” Dr. Bailey said.
In pointing out some major AMA-led victories for physicians in her tenure, Dr. Bailey called out advances made in telemedicine to treat patients during the pandemic, moves to address the root causes of health inequities, and several measures that offered physicians financial safeguards and vital resources.

“We inspire others when we deliver the tools and resources they desperately need in health crisis like COVID-19, when we stand up for science, evidence and data, when we work to build confidence in safe and effective COVID vaccines—and when we are a credible and reliable source for information in a time of rampant misinformation.”

Moving forward with momentum

While the deadliest days of COVID-19 in the U.S. seem to be behind us, Dr. Bailey cautioned against any sort of let up from physicians in the public policy arena.

“At the AMA, particularly after such a difficult year, we know that physicians need more than just our support. We need the AMA’s power and our influence to accomplish what we cannot possibly do on our own,” she said.

Organized medicine, Dr. Bailey said, answered the call during a once-in-a-generation pandemic and will need to be ready to respond proactively to the challenges ahead.

“My friends and colleagues, COVID-19 is a watershed moment in history,” Dr. Bailey said in closing. “It is both an epic tragedy and one of the greatest scientific achievements in our lifetimes. How we emerge from this pandemic will say a lot about where we go from here. The values we hold. The priorities we fight for. Through struggle and triumph, we have lit the way for a better AMA, a better health system, and a stronger, healthier nation.”